

A LINTEL FROM SOUTH KAIPARA HEAD

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In 1971, Daniel Quigley found a carved door lintel in a drainage channel on his father's farm on the South Kaipara Head near Helensville at the place marked by grid reference 854885 on map N37 NZMS1, Helensville. The channel had been excavated some ten feet (3.04 m) into the peat and a section of the channel wall had fallen into the centre of it as a unit. The lintel came from a carefully prepared bed of raupo about thirty centimetres from the top of the collapsed block. Originally, the lintel had been placed just below the surface of the peat and about twenty centimetres from the then surface. A small indentation had been made and lined with raupo, the lintel placed in it and covered with more raupo leaves. Then some of the peat had been replaced to cover both the lintel and raupo. The rising flood waters from a brief period of rain floated the lintel free while the raupo bed remained intact. Daniel Quigley reported his find immediately. Consequently little water damage was done to the lintel and the fallen block from the wall was still mainly intact though it had lost about a third of its lower portion.

The lintel (Fig. 1) is 81.5 cm long at the top and 21.7 cm long at the bottom with a height at the centre of 26.3 cm. It consists of a central female figure with rectangular body. The arms are represented as bars at the side of the body and there are three pointed fingers on the stomach on either side. The legs are not represented but there are feet on either side of the vagina. The head has a high domed forehead with oblique eyes and a mouth which is rounded and open. At the eyebrows the head is 8.2 cm wide while the mouth is 12 cm wide. All the head above the mouth projects above the line of the lintel.

Either side of the central figure are spirals: the one on the left has a raised centre line with groups of crescent lines either side; the one on the right has a groove in the centre with grouped crescents spanning the whole width. Both spirals have been pierced, though in two cases this had not been completed at the bottom. The terminals are manaia, the upper jaw of which is repeated as a toothed decoration down the sides.

The lintel has no flange at the back but has four lashing holes along the base. The piece was certainly carved with stone tools. The wood is probably kauri.

The lintel is remarkable for its domed central figure and the toothed decorations at the side. The overall style of the carving is similar to that of a large door post found at Otakanini some five miles closer to Helensville than the present find (Archey 1933, Plate 41, Fig. 5). Archey relates the latter piece to the Hokianga bone chest styles and to the carvings from Takahue near Kaitaia (Archey 1967, p. 238). Pieces from these areas are all linked by a combination of head form, spiral and surface decoration. The areas are also linked by tribal history as the present or former dwelling places of the Ngati Whatua tribe or their close relatives. The present day



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Fig. 1. The Kaipara lintel (Auck. Mus. 45048).
(Photo: Vahry)

tribe of the South Kaipara is the Ngati Whatua. Te Roroa tribe of Waimamaku, where many of the bone boxes in Auckland Museum come from, are a people whose descent is Ngati Whatua and Ngapuhi. The Takahue valley in Kaitaia is noted as having been occupied by Ngati Whatua hapu which are now sub-tribes of Aupouri. Although there are undoubtedly other traditionally related areas each with their own stylistic variations in the North, the present lintel, the other Kaipara carvings and the Takahue carvings can be characterised as being of Ngati Whatua origin.

The lintel itself is designed for a small house, probably a chief's house. It is likely that, like the Otakanini carvings, it was hidden during the Ngapuhi raids early in the 19th century.

The lintel was presented to Auckland Museum by Daniel Quigley and conserved by Mr Karel Peters of the University of Auckland Anthropology Department.

REFERENCES

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